

Chinese Futures: Horizon 2025

2nd Task Force Meeting: China's Regional Positioning

EUISS Conference room - 100, Avenue de Suffren, 75015 Paris
Wednesday 15 February 2017

Programme

The second meeting of the 'Chinese Futures Task Force' aims to look into the drivers of China's foreign and security policy in Asia. What are the main trends and priorities shaping Beijing's diplomatic efforts and how will they influence its regional positioning in the years to come? Rather than speculating about concrete future events or developments in the surrounding countries, it focuses on some of the key underlying patterns in the Chinese foreign policy discourse. The importance of sovereignty, the use of 'charm offensive' in addressing its neighbourhood, and the role of big power relations are likely to remain constant in China's strategic calculus and future orientation.

9:30 – 10:00 **Arrival and welcome coffee**

10:00 – 11:30 **Session 1: China and the limits of sovereignty**

Kick-off remarks **Charles Parton, EEAS (ret.)**

The protection of national sovereignty and territorial integrity constitutes a cornerstone of the Chinese Communist Party's 'core interest' and probably the most powerful driving force of China's regional policy. The importance of Taiwan, Hong Kong, as well as the claimed territories in the East and the South China Seas, has come to define Beijing's domestic legitimacy, as well as its relations with neighbouring countries. Yet, 'sovereignty' has many shades in China's interpretation, and while all interests may be 'indisputable' in the domestic political discourse, many of them are disputed and seen as ambiguous and deeply problematic abroad. How might China's attitude towards its sovereign claims evolve in the decade to come? Should its assertiveness continue or further increase, what impact will it have for the regional security dynamics? What domestic or regional circumstances could eventually slow down or reverse this trend?

11:30 – 11:45 **Coffee break**

11:45 – 13:15 **Session 2: Cooperation and coercion in China's neighbourhood policy**

Kick-off remarks **Mathieu Duchâtel, ECFR**

A peaceful, stable and prosperous neighbourhood is essential to China's national security and economic growth. Over the past decades, Beijing developed a unique approach to deal with its partners in Southeast Asia (and to a lesser extent also Northeast and Central Asia), trading investments and economic development for political support and strategic guarantees. Economic benefits, appeals to historical ties, loyalty, and ideological or cultural proximity are part of China's 'charm offensive', often paired with coercive language and aggressive actions. How sustainable is this seemingly contradictory policy vis-à-vis its neighbourhood? What does it tell about China's desired security dynamics and bilateral relations? And what impact will it have on the region's multilateral security architecture?

13:15 – 14:00

Lunch

14:00 – 15:30

Session 3: China and big power politics in the Asia-Pacific

Kick-off remarks

Elena Atanassova-Cornelis, University of Antwerp

The US military presence and security commitment in Asia has always been a determinant feature on the regional strategic chessboard, influencing not only the position and actions of its allies but especially China's behaviour. Current developments in Washington and the sense of insecurity they trigger among traditional US allies will most likely lead to more independent security policies of Japan, but also India and Australia, substantially remodelling the regional strategic landscape. How will this affect China's foreign and security policy, deeply rooted in traditional balance-of-power concepts in international relations? Are we likely to see a more assertive China seeking to become the sole regional hegemon, or will it encourage a more multipolar thinking about governance of the Asia-Pacific? And would that look like?

15:30

Wrap-up and conclusions